

Testimony by Mariah Chadukiewicz
Public Health Committee
March 14, 2022

In Support of S.B. 368 - An Act Concerning Suicide Prevention

Hello Senator Daugherty Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Vice Chairs Anwar, Kushner, and Gilchrest, Ranking Members Hwang, Somers, and Petit, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Mariah Chadukiewicz. I am a resident of Cromwell, and a Master's of Social Work student at UConn. I'm also a survivor of suicide loss, and I want to briefly remember today: Joey Parmelee, Kristine Mathena, Evan Boyd Knoll, and Justus Joy. I'm here today to testify **in support of S.B. 368, An Act Concerning Suicide Prevention**. In the course of my MSW internship, I have participated as a member of the CT Suicide Advisory Board and been honored to witness and contribute to the important work the Board does. I support this bill because recognizing the structure of the CT Suicide Advisory Board as addressing the lifespan will allow the Board to more effectively support suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention grief support in Connecticut.

We know that suicide is a major public health problem associated with the mental health crisis that has far-reaching personal, social, and economic implications. In 2021, 367 Connecticut residents died by suicide, most over 18 years old, and there were 39,092 Emergency Room visits in Connecticut for suicide ideation or attempt combined, most under age 24 (CT DPH, 2021).

Some members of the committee may be concerned that changing the language from Youth Advisory Board to a lifespan focus will take attention away from children's mental health. I am confident that the Board believes the mental wellness of children in Connecticut is vitally important and recognizes that these children exist in the world surrounded by adults. The parents, guardians, teachers, and other adults in children's lives influence their mental health and the resources they have access to. If these adults don't have support systems necessary to maintain their own mental health, they can't provide the resources and support necessary to keep children healthy and safe. With a lifespan focus on suicide prevention, all will benefit. Furthermore, despite the current language, the Board has shifted its focus in recent years to operating with a focus on the lifespan, so effectively this legislation will further support those efforts, not significantly change the work that the Board is currently doing.

Recognizing the current structure and focus of the Board will also allow the Board to continue to implement strategies and goals of Connecticut's Strategic Plan for Suicide Prevention. This plan, developed by the Suicide Advisory Board, sets forth the strategies which the Board currently implements as well as goals which can be implemented with further resources. These strategies include, but are not limited to, prevention, effective care and treatment, crisis response, intervention, reducing access to lethal means, increasing help-seeking behavior and connectedness, and postvention response. By supporting this bill and providing support and funding to the Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board in the future, the Board can more effectively implement these goals.

I hope this committee will vote favorably to support SB 368, An Act Concerning Suicide Prevention and will continue to support the Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board going forward. Thank you.

Mariah Chadukiewicz

Sources:

CT DPH 2021 Suicide Data Sheet
CT DPH ED Visits for Suicide Data Ideation and Attempts by Age and Means